NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 508 NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 22, 1906. **Price, Five Cents**

THE GENTLEMAN CROOK'S LAST ACT

OR, NICK CARTER AND THE HAUNTED ISLAND

By The Author Of "Nick Carter"

One of the men threw something into his eyes which blinded him for an instant. A blanket was dropped over his head, a heavy blow fell upon him, and he sank to the floor.

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The Gentleman Crook's Last Act;

OR,

NICK CARTER AND THE HAUNTED ISLAND.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERY ABOUT A DOG.

One morning in midsummer when the thermometer had climbed unusually high, when there seemed to be not a breath of air stirring, and when the humidity was unusually oppressive, Nick Carter rose early and descended the stairs to his front door.

As he opened the door and stepped outside he was astonished to find that a large and beautiful dog was lying there; a dog which now raised his head and wagged his tail in welcome, and which seemed, apparently, to be already very much at home.

He was a handsome creature, too; white, with a suggestion of the shagginess of a polar bear; lean of limb and built for speed, after the fashion of an English greyhound, only much larger, much more massive, heavier, and bolder of aspect; and as he rose somewhat lazily to his feet, the detective at once recognized a perfect specimen of the Siberian wolfhound.

"Hello, boy!" said Nick, patting his head, for the dog seemed friendly enough. "Have you strayed from home and got lost? You are a valuable dog, at all events; much too valuable to be at large in the streets of New York on a hot, midsummer day."

The detective examined the collar and found engraved thereon the one word—or rather the single name "Bruce."

That was all. There was no license number; the owner's name was not there; in fact, there was nothing save the name.

"I should suppose," mused the detective, "that the owner of a valuable dog like you are would have his own name and address engraved upon the collar; but since it is not there, and your own is, I will take good care of you, old fellow, until somebody turns up to claim you."

Somewhat later in the day the detective sent to the *Herald* and the *Telegram* the following advertisement:

"A valuable dog answering to the name of Bruce has been found by a gentleman who will be glad to restore him to his owner upon receipt of a written description and breed of the dog, addressed to FINDER, 693 *Herald*."

During the course of a week which followed upon the insertion of the advertisement there were hundreds of letters received, each of which pretended to describe a dog which answered to the name of Bruce, but not one of which succeeded in coming anywhere near doing so, for a true Siberian wolfhound is a rare article in this country.

And in the meantime Bruce had made himself entirely and thoroughly at home.

There were times, it is true, when he seemed to meditate upon what he had lost; when his wondrously expressive eyes had that far-away look in them one notices in the eyes of wild animals that are held in captivity.

But he seemed to have conceived a wonderful affection for the detective; as if, having lost his home and his master, he was content to substitute Nick Carter.

Chick he tolerated with a sort of lofty dignity which was amusing; the remaining members of the household he rarely noticed at all, seeming not to hear them when one of them spoke to him.

And during that week that has been mentioned the detective had watched the advertising-columns of the several papers in the expectation of discovering something which referred to the lost dog; but when no such advertisement appeared and there came no reply to his own, he said to Chick:

"Doesn't it strike you as somewhat remarkable that a valuable dog like Bruce should be lost and utterly abandoned, as he has been? One would suppose that the owner would advertise for him, or at least that he would reply to my advertisement."

Chick nodded.

"Yes, I have thought of it," he replied.

"Have you noticed, also," asked the detective, "that the collar he wore when he came here was a new one? It had not been worn more than a few days."

"Yes. I noticed that."

"Have the two circumstances made any particular impression upon you, Chick?"

"I can't say that they have—except that you are the fortunate possessor of a very valuable dog. There is many a millionaire in town who would gladly give you five hundred dollars for him."

"I haven't a doubt of it. However, that is not the point."

"What is the point?"

"Have you forgotten 'Bare-faced Jimmy' Duryea, Chick?"

"Eh? Great Scott!"

"See the point?"

"Yes; but——"

"But it hadn't struck you yet, eh?"

"No."

"Do you remember what Nancy Nightingale told me about Jimmy?"

"Sure."

"That he was the most wonderful man at training dogs who ever lived; that is, he was so, in her opinion?"

"Yes."

"And you have not forgotten the three dogs, Rip, Tear, and Tumble, have you?"

"I should say not, Nick?"

"Chick, I have been wondering if Jimmy Duryea is up to another one of his tricks. I have been wondering, in fact, if Jimmy has sent me one of his trained dogs; and I will confess that I am more than half-inclined to think that he has done that very thing."*

"It is almost a year, isn't it, since he was extradited and taken to England?" asked the assistant.

"It is nine months, to be exact."

"Did you follow up that case? Do you know what was done with him when he got there?"

"No, Chick. All that I know is that when the British authorities learned that we had him a requisition was made through the State Department that he be given up to them—and that was finally done. It saved the State of New York the expenses of a trial, and it seemed to be better all around."

"Why don't you cable to Scotland Yard and find out.

"I did that very thing yesterday. I asked the chief inspector there merely to inform me what became of James Duryea. There should be a reply this morning."

And there was.

It came, in fact, a few moments later. It stated:

"James Duryea, known as 'the gentleman crook,' never arrived in England. He disappeared from the steamer when permitted to take a constitutional on deck, and while still two days out. Search was made. He was not found. It was supposed that he had leaped overboard. Record closed at this office with the entry, 'Committed suicide at sea.'"

"Now what do you think of that?" asked the detective, after he had read the cable message aloud to his assistant.

"I think that Jimmy somehow managed to give the officers the slip."

"And that he is still alive, eh?"

"Yes. Alive, and in New York."

"And that Bruce is one of his trained dogs, eh, Chick?"

"Precisely."

"Well, that is the point I was getting at. Let us take the position that the supposition is correct; that Jimmy is alive, in New York, and that he sent me the dog."

"Well?"

"What is his game? What is he up to? Why has he done it?"

"You answer, Nick."

"I have asked for your opinion, Chick."

"Well, according to all precedent, there could be but one answer."

*For a complete history of the previous career of "The Gentleman Crook," the reader should secure Numbers 506 and 507 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

"And that, of course, would be—still according to precedent—that he is following out some scheme of revenge. Eh?"

"That is the only answer—according to precedent, Nick."

"And yet you and I both know that it isn't the answer to this present circumstance."

"Oh, I am not so sure about that."

"I am."

"Why so?"

"First, because Jimmy is not at all like other crooks. Second, because he is by birth and breeding and training a gentleman. Third, because he has nothing against me for which he would even think of revenging himself. It is true that I arrested him, and turned him over to the authorities for one of the most daring and successful burglaries that was ever committed in New York; but Jimmy did not even dislike me for that. He regarded it as the fortune of war. He thought of me as merely having performed my duty. And the fourth reason is a better one than all the others combined."

"What is it?"

"Jimmy Duryea personally likes me. He has said so, and he meant it. There is a deeper motive than that of revenge in this affair."

"What can it be, then?"

"There is where I give it up, Chick. I don't know, and I cannot imagine."

"It has not occurred to you only this morning, then?"

"No, indeed! It occurred to me the moment I discovered Bruce lying on the door-step. My first thought at that time was, 'Here is one of Jimmy Duryea's dogs. I wonder what he has been sent here to do?'"

"I don't suppose you think that Jimmy is meditating a burglary here, in your house; eh?"

"No; not that."

"Possibly he has sent you the dog merely as a present. Having no use for him, and thinking that you would appreciate a fine animal like Bruce, he has——"

"That is nonsense."

"I suppose it is. However, it might have been a roundabout method of informing you that he is still in the land of the living, and is, metaphorically, doing business at the old stand, or something like that."

"No; he would have sent me a message with the dog, in that case."

"But he is shrewd enough to suppose you would guess that the dog came from him, supposing you to be aware of the fact that he is alive, isn't he?"

"Decidedly so."

"Nick, how old is that dog?"

"He is no puppy. I should say that he is about seven; possibly eight."

"Old enough to have known Nancy Nightingale, when she was the wife of Jimmy Duryea; eh?"

"Yes; I think so. I see your idea, Chick. It is a good one, too."

"I think that I would bring Nancy and the dog together, unexpectedly, Nick."

"That is what I will do. You can take a walk around to her apartments right now. Tell her that I want her and Mr. Smathers to come here to dinner at five this afternoon, and that I have purposely set the hour early so that we can have plenty of time before she goes to the theater. Then we will find out if the dog recognizes her. It is a good idea, Chick."

"But it won't tell you anything, even if the dog should recognize her, will it?"

"No. The fact will not—but Nancy may be able to make some suggestions."

CHAPTER II.

THE MOTIVE BEHIND THE ACT.

The dog was stretched comfortably upon a rug in the library when Nancy arrived.

Nick met her in person at the door, and after shaking hands with his guests, he asked the actor, Smathers, to go with Chick to the study while he conducted Nancy to the library.

"I have something here that I wish to show you," he said to her. Then he opened the door and permitted her to pass into the room ahead of him, after which he closed it again, remaining on the outside himself.

But he listened, and it happened as he expected it would.

He heard an exclamation of pleased surprise from Nancy. He heard a low, joyful bark of delight from the dog—and then he opened the door again and entered the room.

The dog was standing erect on his hind legs with his fore paws over Nancy's shoulders, and she had her arms around the animal and her face was half-hidden in his shaggy coat.

"Dear old Robert! Dear old Bruce! Dear boy!" she was saying, and Nick saw that there were tears in her eyes, and that she exhibited a great deal of emotion.

He left the two severely alone until the first transports of joy at the unexpected meeting were over; and then with a smile, he said:

"You and Bruce seem to be old friends, Nan. How is that? And I heard you call him Robert, too; how is that?"

"Old friends, Nick? Old friends, indeed. He was about the only friend I had in those old days when I was Jimmy Duryea's wife, and when I first discovered that he was a professional burglar. And as for the name—his name is Robert Bruce. He was called one as much as the other. I always called him Bruce, and Jimmy's name for him was Robert. Dear old fellow! He was

always my dog; always devoted to me. I knew him instantly, and he recognized me just as quickly."

"So I perceived."

"How did he come here, Nick?"

"I found him waiting on the steps for me, one morning, rather more than a week ago."

"And you suspected that——"

"I suspected at once that Jimmy had sent him to me, or had brought him to me, although I cannot for the life of me guess his reason for doing so."

"But how could he do that, Nick? He is in prison, isn't he, in England?"

"No; I cabled to Scotland Yard. They report that he disappeared from the ship, on his way over, and it is supposed that he committed suicide. I suppose he found some method of eluding the officers, and managed to make his escape."

"And you think he is here in New York?"

"I am reasonably certain of it."

"But why would he send you this dog?"

"That is a question which I had hopes that you might be able to answer for me."

She shook her head.

"No," she said, "I cannot imagine."

"He might have wished you to have the dog, Nan."

"In that case he would have sent him directly to me."

"Possibly not. You are married again, now, and very happily so. It might have been his thought that it would be more graceful to send you the dog through me."

She shook her head again.

"Chick suggested that Jimmy might have some idea of revenge against me," continued the detective, "of getting even for my spoiling his play for a million."

"No; it is not that. It is something else," said Nan.

"But what?"

"I haven't an idea—now. I will think it over."

"Very good. But while we are here alone, tell me something about the history of the dog."

"Jimmy got him in St. Petersburg when he was a three-months-old puppy—and of course he began at once to educate him. You know there never was a time when he did not have a lot of dogs, and you know about his ability at training them."

"Yes."

"Bruce proved himself to be the smartest dog that Jimmy ever had, but he also seemed to possess a moral sense. That seems absurd on the face of it, but I sincerely believe it to be true."

"I haven't a doubt of it. Dogs think and reason; they have ideas; they possess patience, perseverance, and they certainly know the difference between right and wrong, judging right and wrong from their own views, of course."

"I know that Bruce does."

"Why do you know it?"

"Because Jimmy could never make a thief, or an assistant to a thief, of Bruce. He taught the dog to turn a key in a door with his teeth, and to turn the knob of the door with his paws and open it after he had unlocked it. He would do the trick perfectly at our own house, in reply to a certain signal given him from outside; and he would walk out as quietly after it was done as a mouse might have done it.

"But whenever Jimmy tried him upon a house he wished to rob, Bruce would leap outside and bark loud enough to raise the dead the moment he had done the trick.

"I suppose you remember, do you not, that Jimmy's method was to train his dogs so that he could present them—or through a dog-fancier sell them—to a gentleman whose house he intended to rob?"

"Yes."

"The dogs were so trained that they answered to two names. For example, there was one dog that had the names of Rob and Rip. Jimmy called him Rob. Whenever the dog was in the hands of strangers, 'on duty,' Jimmy called it, he answered to the name of Rip."

"I remember Rip very well."

"Well, as Rip, it was his duty never to recognize Jimmy at all, even though he spoke to him. If Jimmy spoke to him as Rip, Rip growled and showed his displeasure. If he spoke to him as Rob, the dog was instantly his own again and would obey his slightest word. When he was 'on duty,' Jimmy could visit the house every day where he was staying, and Rip would never notice him or appear to see him at all. Then some night Jimmy would break into the house, and whisper Rob in his ear; and Rob would not only assist him in committing the robbery, but he would stand on guard, and give Jimmy warning if any one in the house stirred."

"And then, after the robbery, Jimmy stole the dog back again, didn't he?"

"Yes—if the man who supposed he owned him did not kick the dog out of the house for his failure to keep watch and guard over his property. Jimmy always got his dogs back again somehow."

"But you say that Bruce would not assist him in his robberies?"

"No; he would not. He seemed to realize, even if he lived in a stranger's house only a short time—a few days or a week—that he had a duty to perform, and although he would unlock and open the door in answer to a signal from outside, he seemed to know that Jimmy had no right to enter the house, and he invariably barked and roused his temporary master before Jimmy could accomplish anything at all.

"He was almost human, too, in his ability to open doors. He would take down a chain-bolt almost as dexterously as you could do it. He would push up the round knob of an ordinary bolt and then shove it back

with his nose. He would take the ring of a key in his teeth, and turn it as silently as you could do it with your fingers, and he would lean the weight of his body against a door and use both paws in turning the knob—but usually he didn't have to do that part of it."

"Why?"

"Because Jimmy would already be at the outside of the door, waiting to turn the knob and enter as soon as it was unlocked."

"But always the dog gave warning, eh?"

"Always."

"It is a wonder that Jimmy did not kill him."

"He did try to do it once—but I intervened. I loved Bruce and I saved his life."

"And that, doubtless, is one reason why the dog loves you."

"Very likely; although he always loved me, ever since Jimmy got him."

"How long is it now since you have seen the dog?"

"Four years, Nick."

"Where did you see him last?"

"In England. I supposed he was there now. You know that Jimmy and I went to South Africa. Then we came here, but we returned by way of Liverpool, although we were ashore only enough to change from one steamer to another—but it was long enough for Jimmy to give the dog away, to one of his old pals, without my knowledge. I never quite forgave him for that."

"And Jimmy never brought the dog here?"

"No. Once he promised to do so, but he didn't do it."

"Have you ever thought of sending for the dog yourself?"

"Yes; but there were two reasons why I never did so."

"What are they, Nan?"

"One is that I did not know where he was or who had him; the other was, that having obtained my divorce from Jimmy after he was sent to prison here, and then a year later having married again, I thought it best not to attempt to do so."

"You are perfectly happy in your married life now, aren't you, Nan?"

"Entirely so. I have the best husband in the world."

"I knew that Smathers would make you happy, girl. But we won't go into that. Have you ever heard anything from Jimmy, at all? In any manner?"

"Never a word since he promised you, just before I went on the stage, that he would never interfere with me again?"

"I have told you, haven't I, that Jimmy married Madge Babbington about the time you married Smathers?"

"Yes."

"So even if Jimmy still thinks of you, you do not suppose that he would make any actual effort to—to—well, to see you again, do you?"

"No, I do not."

"And yet, Nan, Jimmy never left that dog on my doorstep without having a well-defined motive in doing it."

"That is true. Jimmy is deep—very deep. He had a purpose in it, you may be sure."

"Do you suppose that his purpose has anything to do with you?"

"No; I cannot think that it does, for in that case he would have brought the dog to me instead of to you."

"I am not sure about that, Nan. For instance, you would like it if I should say to you now, 'Take the dog home with you, Nan.' You would like that, wouldn't you?"

"Indeed, I would like it."

"And you would take him, wouldn't you?"

"I certainly would. I meant to ask you for him, anyhow; and I know that you will let me have him."

"Perhaps not, Nan."

"Why?"

"Because I am a little afraid to let you have him."

"Again, why?"

"It may be that that is exactly what Jimmy expected would happen; that you would see the dog; that you would recognize each other; that I would at once say to you, 'Take the dog and keep him.'"

For answer, Nan spoke to Bruce, and when he approached her, she put her hand on his head; and then she said:

"Nick, Jimmy or a thousand Jimmies would not dare to lay a hand on me now. He would tear a man to pieces who dared to interfere with me—and you know that a Siberian wolfhound can be very fierce at times. No; that is not it. It is something else."

"And, anyhow, you want Bruce, eh?"

"Yes. Anyhow I want Bruce. I'll take my chances with him."

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

And the result of it was that Nan took the dog away with her and started for her home before she went to the theater that night.

As he watched her go away with the dog, the detective's thought was——

"If it was a part of Jimmy's plan that I should give the dog to Nan, that much of it has been carried out, at least;" and then, as Chick turned to reenter the house, the detective added:

"If I did not feel perfectly sure, Chick, that Jimmy Duryea would not do anything to injure Nan, I would not think of letting that dog go with her; but under the circumstances I somehow feel that it is best to do so."

Chick shrugged his shoulders.

"You are boss, Nick," he said. "If it was my picnic I should have kept the dog here."

The two detectives returned inside the house then, and Nick went directly to his studio, where he resumed the reading of a book that interested him.

It did not seem very long after that when the telephone-bell rang sharply, and then he turned at once and placed the receiver to his ear.

"Hello!" said a voice at the other end. "I want Nick Carter."

"All right," replied Nick. "You've got him."

"This is Pettis, manager of Crawford's Theater."

"Yes. I recognized your voice. What can I do for you, Pettis?"

"Is Nancy at your house?"

"No. She was here to dinner, but she left about two hours ago."

"Did she leave to come here to the theater, or——"

"No; she was going home, first."

"Sure about that?"

"Yes."

"Was she alone?"

"No; her husband was with her. What in the world is the matter with you, anyway?"

"Nancy has not been home at all. All that is known about her there is that she was dining at your house and intended to come directly here from there. I sent up to the house after her, and when I got that word I waited as long as I dared before calling you up, thinking that she would be in at any moment. But now it is almost time for her to go on the stage and she is not here and I haven't a word from her."

"Wait. Is Smathers there?"

"No. Neither of them have shown up."

"You say you sent to the house after them?"

"Yes; sent a boy up. He was told——"

"Yes. I understand. You told me all that once. Good-by."

"But I say, Carter!"

"Yes?"

"Don't you think it is rather strange? She was never late before, you know."

"Yes; it is strange; but doubtless she will explain when she gets there. In the meantime, I know nothing more about it than I have told you. She left the house here about two hours ago, intending to go to her own home and then directly to the theater. She will probably be there in a moment or so."

Nick returned the receiver to the hook, and then got upon his feet.

"Now, I wonder——" he began, and stopped.

"It doesn't do any good to be wondering, and it is plain that I can discover nothing by going around to her home. I'll wait a few moments and then call up the theater. She will be there by that time, of course. I suppose she has got to petting that dog, and has not noticed how the time passed. Still, Smathers was with her, and—— But he may have left her somewhere, on the way home. Still, if he had done that, he would himself be at the theater by this time."

The detective was still lost in a brown study when the telephone-bell rang sharply again; and when he replied to the call, a voice which he did not recognize inquired:

"Is this Nick Carter?"

"Yes," replied the detective. "Who are you?"

The man at the other end of the wire ignored the question even though Nick repeated it; and then, just as Nick, impatiently, was about to replace the receiver, there came another "Hello!" It was as if the man at the opposite end of the wire had taken his own receiver away from his ear while he talked with somebody who was standing near him.

"Are you still there, Nick Carter?" the voice asked.

"Yes; who——"

"Excuse me. You wouldn't know who I am if I should tell you. I have a message for you."

"Very well," said Nick. "Deliver it."

"First, was it you who advertised that you had found a dog which the owner could have by describing the same?"

"We will say that it was I, for the sake of the situation. What of it?"

"Merely that the owner is here at my elbow, and he directs me to say that the dog has been recovered. Good-by."

"*Wait!*" called the detective sharply; but he heard the click of the instrument at the other end, indicating that the man had left the wire.

There is probably nothing on earth that is more aggravating than to have one with whom you are conversing over a telephone suddenly hang up his receiver and leave the wire. One is so helpless to object. The utter impotency of retaliation is so apparent.

It is a blessed thing that the invention of the telephone did not include the ability to send clubs and other murderous instruments over a telephonic wire.

The detective waited a moment, and then he called Central.

"I wish to ascertain at once, if you will do me the kindness, where that last call for my telephone came from," he said.

There was a wait of several moments, and then he was informed that the call had been made from one of the public booths at the Hotel Mammoth.

The detective thanked the operator and leaned back in his chair. Then suddenly he started to his feet and, seizing his hat, darted from the house to the street, and in a moment was hastening toward the hotel in question.

"There is something doing," he muttered, as he hurried along, "but the trouble is that I have not the faintest idea what Jimmy Duryea is up to."

Arrived at the hotel he went at once to the operator at the switchboard.

"Less than half an hour ago you registered a call for my house," he said to her, as he repeated his own number.

"Yes, sir," replied the operator, as she placed her finger upon the call in question where she had entered it upon the book.

"I wonder," said the detective, "if you happen to remember what sort of a person it was who asked for that number?"

"I do, sir, for the reason that it was one of the hall-boys. He said he was getting the number for a guest," was the reply.

"Do you know which boy it was?" asked Nick.

"Number Forty-five."

Nick thanked the operator and turned away. Then he went to the desk and asked for "45," and after a few moments' wait he had the boy over in a corner, where he could talk to him.

"What is your name?" he asked him.

"Peter Mahl, sir."

"Well, Peter, it isn't very long ago that you telephoned to me about a dog. Do you remember it?"

"Gee, mister! Are you Nick Carter?"

"Yes."

"Of course, I remember it. I have always wanted to see you, sir, and——"

"Never mind that part of it, just at present. Tell me about the man who asked you to do his telephoning for him."

"There ain't anything to tell about him, except that he asked me, and that I did it."

"What did he look like?"

"He was smooth shaven, well dressed—looked like a swell. He was well dressed and he had a wad of money as big as me two fists."

"Is he stopping here at the hotel?"

"He said he was."

"Had you ever seen him before?"

"No, sir."

"Did he tell you his name?"

"No, sir."

"Tell me everything that he said to you."

"I was sitting on me bench when he comes up to me, and he says, 'Boy, I want you;' and when I jumps up he takes me over to the telephone-booth, and he says, 'You're to ask for'—I forget the number—'Madison; and when you've got it I'll tell you what to say.'"

"And then——"

"Then when I gets the number he follows me to the booth, and he stands just outside and he says, 'Ask if it's Nick Carter at the other end.'

"That almost knocked me out, for I wasn't expectin' to talk with the great detective; but when I comes to, he tells me to ask if you are the feller who advertised about a dog, and he tells me just what to say and do when you says yes. I didn't think it was very civil, sir, but he was payin' me, and I couldn't do no different. Then I hangs up the receiver, and he goes to the desk and pays for the call, and then he comes back and he gives me a dollar for my trouble, and then he goes down the corridor toward the café, and that is the last I sees of him 'cause at that moment the captain calls me to the desk. That's all I know, Mr. Carter."

The detective tipped the boy, and then he said:

"I want you to keep a sharp lookout for that man, Peter, and I want you to keep it up until I tell you to stop, if it takes all summer. Carry your cap in your pocket so that you can leave the hotel in an instant if it becomes necessary, and if you see the man, follow him without his knowing it—if you can. Do you think you can do it?"

"I can try, sir."

"That's the way to talk. If the opportunity occurs, you needn't stop to ask permission of anybody to leave the hotel; just go."

"I'll lose me job, sir."

"I will see to it that you do not; or if you do lose it, I will get you a better one—and besides, I will pay you well for your trouble."

"I'll do it, sir."

"There is my card with my address and my telephone call on it. The minute you know anything you are to inform me at once. If I don't happen to reply to a telephone call in person, you will give your message to whoever does answer, saying that the information comes from Peter."

"I understand, sir."

"Now keep your eyes and your ears open. Go about your regular duties just as you always do, and above all, you must not mention to anybody the fact that you are doing this for me, or that you have seen me or spoken to me at all. Can you keep all that to yourself?"

"I can make a stab at it, sir," was the reply.

"All right, Peter. I guess you'll do."

The detective turned away then. He left the hotel and he went swiftly in the direction of Nan Nightingale's home.

He knew instinctively that there would be no use in calling up the theater again, for he thought he knew Nan well enough to know that something had happened to her before Pettis sent his message in to the effect that she and her husband were missing.

CHAPTER IV.

A BLOODHOUND ON THE SCENT.

As he mounted the steps of Nan's home, he looked at his watch and discovered that it was already a few moments after nine o'clock. Then he rang the bell.

When he was ushered into the parlor, Nancy's aunt, who lived with her, came to him at once, and before Nick could ask a question, she exclaimed:

"Why, Mr. Carter! I have only just this moment sent away the things you asked for in your note. What——"

"Wait a moment, please," interrupted Nick. "To what note do you refer?"

"Why, the one you sent to me, of course."

"Have you got it about you? Let me see it, please."

The old lady went to the table and searched there a moment; then she returned with a folded slip of paper in her hand.

"Here it is," she said.

The detective took the note and read:

"'Nancy and Mr. Smathers, together with other guests, are going with me for a cruise on my yacht, the *Nadja*. She has not time to write this herself, but she begs me to ask you if you will be so kind as to pack a few necessary articles for a week's trip for her. Put them in a dress-suit case and deliver to bearer.'"

The note was plainly addressed to Nancy's aunt, and was signed, "Yours truly, Nick Carter."

But there had been no attempt at forgery, or at imitation of Nick's handwriting; and the detective smiled when he remembered that there had been no necessity for that since it was doubtful if the good woman before him had ever seen his writing at all.

It had been entirely sufficient for her that the name of the detective was signed to the letter, and she had obeyed the demand made in it, at once.

"When was this note brought here?" he asked of her.

"Not half an hour ago, sir."

"Who brought it?"

"A district messenger boy."

"Did you happen to notice his number?"

"No; I did not think of it."

"Of course not. How long is it since he left here with the dress-suit case?"

"It could have been only a few moments before you came, Mr. Carter."

"Has Nancy been at home at all since she left here to go to my house, to dinner?"

"No."

"Or her husband?"

"No."

"And this is the only news you have had of her since that time?"

"Yes. Mr. Pettis sent up here to know——"

"Yes. I know about that."

"Wasn't she at your house at dinner, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes. She left there to come here again before going to the theater. Mr. Smathers was with her, so nothing serious could have happened; still, it is strange why she should have disappeared in such a manner, and stranger that her effects should have been sent for in the manner they have, and with the use of my name."

"You did not send this note to me, then?"

"Certainly not. If you had ever seen my handwriting, you would have known at once that I had nothing to do with the writing of that note."

"Oh, Mr. Carter, if——"

"My dear madam, I do not think there is any cause for undue alarm. At all events, I shall not rest until I know where she is, and who wrote that note."

As soon as the detective gained the street, he summoned a passing cab which happened to be near, and directed the driver to take him at once to his home.

An idea had just occurred to him which offered promises of being productive, and he was determined to put it to a test at once, and without delay.

Readers of the adventures of the great detective will remember that among his possessions was a great Cuban bloodhound which answers to the name of Pedro, and that Pedro's sagacity and intelligence were and are little short of marvelous.*

Pedro was rated almost as one of the detective's most proficient assistants, and, indeed, he has assisted Nick in many a case.

Pedro is also a privileged character. He has the run of the detective's home, and on all occasions he displays the intelligence of a human being.

Nevertheless, he had resented the presence of Bruce in the house. He was jealous of the wolfhound, and he did not hesitate to show it, although at no time did he express his displeasure by more than sullen looks and low growls whenever Bruce ventured too near to him.

Now it suddenly occurred to the detective that Pedro might be able to take Bruce's track and follow it, even though it was already some hours old; yet the scent of the dog was wonderful, and at least the detective was determined to try it.

It was ten o'clock when he reached his home, and it was, therefore, three hours since Nancy left the house with her husband and the dog; but Pedro had more than once taken a trail that was older than that, and he called Pedro to him as soon as he was there.

Pedro always occupied the library at night, while Bruce, since his advent, had been allowed to sleep on a blanket in the detective's study; and thither the detective led the bloodhound at once.

He closed the door and pulled the blanket on which Bruce had been accustomed to lie to the middle of the room. Then he pointed at it, and to Pedro he said:

"Scent it, old fellow! Take the scent!"

Pedro kept his nose in the air and uttered a low growl.

"None of that, Pedro! I want you to find him. Take the scent, Pedro!"

*Read No. 470 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "Pedro, the Dog Detective."

The bloodhound's tail wagged sluggishly from side to side two or three times, evincing the fact that he understood perfectly what was required of him.

He sniffed around the blanket two or three times, turned it over with his nose, and then raised his head and looked his master in the eye as if to say:

"Oh, I know the scent all right. I don't have to nose around that blanket to remember the dog you petted so much while he was here."

Nick laughed aloud, and patted Pedro's head.

"Pedro," he said, "I am afraid that you are an awful chump. You are jealous and you ought to be ashamed of it. Don't you think so?"

Pedro wagged his tail and looked a trifle sheepish.

"There isn't another dog on earth, Pedro, who could take your place in my affections," continued the detective. "Get up here and put your paws around my neck. That's right;" and Nick hugged the huge body close against himself.

"Now, Pedro," he said, after a moment, "get down and stand at attention."

The dog obeyed instantly, standing with his head a little to one side and with every evidence of eagerness in his expression.

"Old fellow," said Nick, then, "I want you to find Bruce for me; Bruce and Nan. Do you remember Nan?"

Pedro wagged his tail.

"Nan is lost, Pedro. Lost. You must find her. Find Bruce, Pedro. Find him!"

Pedro raised his head. He emitted one low, booming bay, such as only bloodhounds can utter, and then he turned and trotted to the door, standing there and waiting to be let out.

"That's business," said the detective. "I think you understand me now, and I think you will do it, too."

He led the way to the street, and outside the door Pedro at once placed his nose against the pavement.

For a moment Nick stood and watched him while the bloodhound circled around several times and at last started off toward the north.

The detective followed and Pedro turned the next corner, went through to Madison Avenue, and then turned northward again.

Suddenly, half-way along this block, he stopped. Then he ran around in circles several times until finally he stopped, and raising his eyes to his master's face, he uttered a short, quick bark.

"Something happened right here, eh?" said the detective. "You would tell me exactly what it was if you could talk, wouldn't you, old fellow? Find Nan, Pedro!"

Pedro did not move; he stood quite still, wagging his tail.

"Find Nan!" ordered the detective.

Still the dog did not move.

"Find Bruce!" came the next order; and instantly Pedro's nose dropped to the ground.

He did no more circling now, but he darted at once toward the middle of the street, and he would have started away up the avenue without waiting, had not his master called to him.

"Wait, Pedro," he said. "I am beginning to understand this affair a little better now. I want to get it straight in my mind before we go ahead."

The dog wagged his head and listened as if he understood; and Nick continued:

"Nan came this way as far as this spot, and here—right here—she encountered somebody who stopped her. There must have been a conveyance of some sort standing against the curb right here, too, for you have told me that as plainly as if you could utter it in words.

"Nan's scent stops right here. So does that of Smathers, for you would take that almost as readily as you took Nan's.

"She moved around a good bit here, too. Your circling about before you gave up the scent tells me that; and then, of course, she must have gotten into a cab, or have been thrust into one, otherwise you would not have lost the scent.

"I wonder why Bruce did not attack whoever it was who attacked Nan? We can't tell that just now, can we, Pedro? Probably you could if you could talk; but you can't do that.

"Anyhow, Bruce was taken into the vehicle, whatever it was. He was left to go where he would, or to follow along if he chose to do so; and we know that he did follow, for you are now on his track ready to pursue it, aren't you, Pedro?

"Wait, old fellow," he added a moment later. "Here comes a policeman, and I have an idea."

As soon as the officer had approached near enough to be addressed, Nick said to him:

"Officer, is one of your telephone-stations near here?"

"Just around the corner, sir," was the reply.

"I wish you would go to it and call up your station-house. Tell the sergeant at the desk that Nick Carter is waiting here on your beat, and that I have requested that he will order a saddled horse sent here to me at once. Say that it is very important, and that I will be grateful if he will get it here as soon as possible. I want a good horse, too, whether it is one that belongs to the mounted police, or comes from a livery. I will wait right here with the dog till it comes."

"Yes, sir," was the instant reply.

Fortunately, the detective had not long to wait.

In less than half an hour after that he leaped into the saddle on the back of a beautiful bay, and having given the word to Pedro, they dashed away up the avenue at a sharp pace.

After traveling some distance, they turned to the west-

ward and presently came to a stop near one of the side entrances of the Hotel Mammoth; and here Pedro crossed to the opposite side of the street and perched himself upon the curb for a moment.

But he remained there only a moment, as if to tell the detective that Bruce had also stopped there; then he started on again, still through the street, and presently he paused again near a corner that was nearest to Nancy Nightingale's home.

"It's as plain as day, so far," mused the detective. "The carriage stopped at the Mammoth long enough for that telephone message to be sent to me. Then it drove to this corner while the dress-suit case was sent for; and then——"

He waved his hand at Pedro, and called out:

"Find Bruce, old fellow! Find him, boy!"

CHAPTER V.

A DIFFICULT TRAIL TO FOLLOW.

The sagacious dog started ahead at once.

He went only a little way toward the south, and then turned through another street back to Fifth Avenue.

Here he started northward again, and so on into the park at Fifty-ninth Street.

Here he kept to the eastern driveway as far as the Seventy-second Street entrance, where he came to a stop and, seating himself on his haunches, raised his head and howled.

"Now what has happened?" mused the detective.

He got down from his horse, and producing his pocket search-light, for the night was quite dark, he began an examination of the road; and he was not long in discovering that an automobile had been drawn up at one side of the roadway there, and had been waiting.

This fact was easily determinable for the reason that considerable oil had dripped upon the ground where the motor had been standing; and also the detective saw where the carriage, which had been driven thus far with Nan inside, had turned about and gone back to the city.

"Find Bruce!" ordered the detective, putting one foot in the stirrup, preparatory to remounting his horse.

But he did not mount at once, for instantly Pedro dashed across the road and into the bushes that lined one side of it.

"Here!" called the detective. "Wait a moment!"

Then, leading the horse, he followed the dog across the grass for a considerable distance until they had made a wide detour which brought them presently back to the roadway again.

But Pedro, in following the track, did not take to the roadway.

He kept at one side of it, off the beaten way, where no doubt he had been partially concealed from view from the occupants of the automobile he was pursuing; and the detective murmured:

"I understand now. When they changed from the carriage to the motor-car, they discovered that Bruce was following them. They probably threw something at him, or shot at him, and so drove him away—or supposed they did so. But as a matter of fact the dog merely dodged out of sight and still followed them along the side of the roadway. That is as it should be. It will render it all the easier for Pedro to follow and keep the trail."

Their direction kept them in the park, and they did not leave it until they arrived at the St. Nicholas Avenue entrance at 110th Street; and here Pedro took the sidewalk, showing that Bruce was still keeping well in the rear and as much out of sight as possible; but that all the same he was following.

Their way led from St. Nicholas Avenue into St. Nicholas Place, and thence, at 155th Street, into the Speedway.

This latter follows along the shore of the Harlem River under High Bridge and Washington Bridge; and thence around a long and winding curve, they gradually mounted the elevation known as Washington Heights.

They crossed Amsterdam Avenue and continued on to Broadway; they turned northward again on Broadway and continued on to the bridge which crosses the ship canal at 225th Street.

But there was no pause made here.

They crossed the river into Westchester County, and here their way bore to the right, and toward White Plains.

Nick's horse was beginning to tire, and with a word of command the detective compelled Pedro to take a somewhat slower pace, and in this manner they continued on their way in a southerly and easterly direction until the detective knew that they were approaching the Sound.

We need not pause here to describe all the deviations of that journey; suffice it to say that in the early hours of the morning, just as day was breaking, they arrived at the shore of the Sound at a place which Nick judged to be just west of the American Yacht Club anchorage, near Harrison's station on the New Haven Railroad.

Nick dismounted then, for Pedro had seated himself upon his haunches at the edge of the water and had raised his head and bayed at the restless tide.

"So," said the detective, "we are at the end of our rope, are we, old fellow? Anyhow, we will rest where we are until daylight."

The day came swiftly.

In less than half an hour it was full upon them, and then Nick had no difficulty in discovering, farther back from the shore, the tracks left by the wheels of the automobile.

There were also indications on the beach that a craft of some kind had held her nose against the sand for a

time; and there were footprints around the indentation which showed where the boat had been pushed off.

The tracks of the automobile, farther back, indicated that it had been backed and turned around, and that it had retreated as it came.

"I wonder if they discovered that the dog had followed them all the way here, and so decided to take him into the boat with them?" mused the detective. Then, aloud, he said:

"Find Bruce, Pedro! Find Bruce!"

Pedro raised his head again, looked off over the sound, and howled.

"Went that way, did he?" said the detective.

Suddenly Pedro's howl changed into an unmistakable bark, and he began to run up and down the shore with every evidence of excitement; and as Nick looked out over the water, he saw, far in the distance, a white object which was steadily approaching them.

A second glance told him what it was, and he uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

The object was Bruce, swimming in the water, and he acted as if he were thoroughly exhausted.

Several times, as he approached, he seemed to stop struggling, and for a moment sank out of sight; but each time he came to the surface again and struggled on.

"Pedro," said Nick suddenly, "Bruce is drowning. Go to him, boy. Save him."

He began rapidly to divest himself of his own clothing, determined that the dog should not drown if he could save him; but Pedro had not waited for a second bidding.

The bloodhound was already in the water and was swimming rapidly toward the struggling dog, whom until now he had so thoroughly disliked, merely because he regarded him as an interloper.

But he had comprehended his master's order, and he acted upon it instantly.

His great strength and powerful strokes took him swiftly toward Bruce; and when he reached him, with a sagacity that was more than human, he dived under him so that he came up beneath the body of the wolfhound, and then, with the white dog clinging to his back, he began to swim rapidly toward the shore.

Bruce, too, seemed thoroughly to realize what was being done for him, and he was wise enough to use what strength he had remaining, to cling to the back of his rescuer.

And so they came to the shore.

If it is possible for a dog to faint from exhaustion, Bruce, the wolfhound, fainted then.

His feet were barely upon solid ground ere he collapsed more like a dead dog than a living one.

But Nick worked over him, rubbing him and patting him gently, to assist as much as possible in restoring the circulation; and Pedro used his tongue vigorously upon the prostrate dog, as if he also realized the emergency.

After a little, Bruce opened his eyes and looked up at Nick with an expression that was almost human; and then, as Pedro's head came nearer to him, he licked the bloodhound's heavy jowls with his tongue as if he were trying to express his gratitude for what had been done for him.

The detective left him then; but presently he returned with his hat full of fresh water, which Bruce drank eagerly; and after that he recovered rapidly, so that presently he struggled to his feet, and with a feeble attempt to wag his tail, seated himself upon his haunches and looked up at Nick as if he would give all the world if only he had the power of speech.

"I know what you want to tell me, old chap," said Nick kindly, patting his head. "You want to say that you followed them to this spot; that you saw them enter some kind of a boat—probably a small launch; that when they put off from the shore you made an effort to follow them, and that you actually did so until they were far out in the Sound; but that the launch went too fast for you to keep up with it, and that, when you lost sight of it, there was only one thing left for you to do, which was to return here and wait for them, believing that sooner or later they would come back.

"But what I do not know is, which way they turned after they got outside a little.

"Did they go east or west? Toward New York again, or toward Rye?"

"Them's a pair of purty dogs you've got there, mister," said a voice from behind the detective, who had been so absorbed in his thought that he had not heard the sound of approaching footsteps.

But he wheeled quickly and encountered a familiar figure along the Sound shore; a clam-digger.

"Yes," replied the detective. "They are a fine pair of dogs."

"I saw that white one a little while ago, mister. Say, he ain't a greyhound, is he?"

"No; he is a Siberian wolfhound. Where did you see him?"

"Right along here. There was a gasoline-launch which had just left the shore when I came, and the dog was a-standin' right where you are now, mister, a-watchin' it. After a minute, what does he do but jump in and take after the boat! And he swims like an otter, too; only the boat was too fast for him."

"Did you watch the dog?" asked Nick.

"Yes. For a good while—until he was out of sight. I tried to call him back, but he wouldn't come; and then I yelled at the people in the boat, but I guess they didn't hear me—or else they wanted the dog to drown."

"Very likely. Could you tell me how many people there were in the boat?"

"Sure. Four men."

"Wasn't there a woman with them?"

"I didn't see any, if there was, mister."

"Did you see any signs of an automobile around here?"

"No; but I heard one."

"Did you? When?"

"Just a little while before I saw the boat."

"When you first saw the boat, had it left the shore?"

"Yes; it was two or three hundred yards off shore, sir."

"I don't suppose it would be possible for you to describe any of the men you saw in the boat, would it?"

"No; they were too far away."

"How long did you watch the boat?"

"I didn't watch the boat at all. I was watching the dog."

"But you know which way the boat turned, don't you?"

"Yes. Toward Rye; or, at least, in that direction; but she headed out into the Sound. I think she was going farther than Rye."

"How big a boat was it?"

"About a twenty-footer, I should say."

"What color?"

"White."

"Had you ever seen the boat before? I mean, would you know the boat if you should happen to see it again?"

"Sure."

"To which question?"

"To both of 'em."

"How much do you expect to earn to-day digging clams?"

"Two dollars, maybe."

"I'll give you five if you'll help me find that boat."

"Mister, I'm your'n to command."

CHAPTER VI.

TRACKED ACROSS THE WATER.

"What and where, in your opinion, would be the best way to begin the search?" asked Nick.

The clam-digger grinned, and then he replied:

"Well, sir, you see, we can't exactly walk on the water—leastwise, I can't."

"No."

"But down here a spell I've got a friend who owns a skipjack that's got an engine in her so that she can go along a-plenty."

"Has he got a place, too, where I can leave my horse?"

"Sure he has."

"Then come along, and, with the aid of the skipjack, possibly we can get some trace of the launch we want to find."

"Mister, there ain't no sort of doubt about that. I know that launch, and I know jest where to look for her."

"Where?"

"Well, there's an island just outside of Norwalk harbor which is called by some Indian name which for the minute I forgit; but that boat belongs there. I've seen her many a time. There's a feller there whose name is Wickiup, as owns her; but I knows that he wasn't in the boat when I saw her, cos I'd ha' know'd him easy."

"You are positive about that, are you?"

"Sure, I'm certain. I know a boat as well as a jockey knows a hoss. Boats have just as much expression as a man, if you only look for it."

They had retraced their steps to the road by this time and were now moving rapidly along it toward the place where the clam-digger said the skipjack could be hired.

And after due time it was found and possession was secured, its owner going along with them to run the engine.

The dogs were taken aboard, and the horse was cared for in a stable, and the voyage in this skipjack was begun.

"Tell me about that island," said Nick, when they were well upon their way.

"I forgit the Indian name of it, as I said afore, sir, but it's got some cottages and a sort of hotel on it. There is nobody there now, of course, only two men, and one of 'em is the young feller Wickiup, what I mentioned. I don't know as the party you're lookin' for went to that island. All that I know is that the boat belongs there; and the man as owns it belongs there, and maybe when we git there he'll be able to tell you something about it."

"Very probably."

It was quite a long run, and the time was well along in the forenoon when at last they drew up alongside of the pier at the island.

But they had not landed before the clam-digger pointed triumphantly toward a launch that was moored to a buoy near the pier, and said:

"There's your boat, mister."

"You are certain that that is the same one?" asked Nick.

"Just as certain as that I am sitting here, sir."

When they had made their landing, and had climbed upon the pier, Nick found that a young man was already approaching them from one of the cottages; and when he was close enough the detective inquired:

"Are you Mr. Wickiup?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"Is that your launch?"

"It is."

"Has she been out this morning?"

"She has just come in, if that is what you mean."

"I suppose, as a matter of fact, that she has been out all night, hasn't she?" asked the detective.

"I don't know about that," replied the owner of the

boat. "There is a mystery about it that I have been trying to solve."

"Indeed!" said Nick. "I am troubled with a small mystery in connection with your boat, also. Tell me about your mystery, and I will tell you about mine."

"Will you tell me first who you are and why you make the inquiry about the boat?" asked its owner.

"I am Nick Carter, a detective from New York. I am in search of two people—a man and a woman—who I have reason to believe have lately been passengers on that boat. Now, will you tell me about your mystery?"

"It isn't much. It is only that about three hours ago—after I had missed my boat——"

"Missed her? Had she been stolen?"

"That is what I am trying to tell you. When I got up this morning, soon after daylight, I discovered that my launch had disappeared. I rowed out to the buoy and discovered, as nearly as I could determine, that the anchor-rope had somehow got frayed off during the night, though why it should have done so, or how it could have been done, I don't know. There was no wind, and the rope was new."

"The mere fact is that your boat was gone, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"About three hours ago I saw a boat coming toward the island from the south—that is, from the Sound—which I thought was mine. When she came nearer, I knew it was mine. She was headed straight for the island, so I waited."

"Yes?"

"There was only one man aboard of her. When he landed, he said that he had found the boat—my boat—adrift out in the Sound. He boarded her, and found that she was all right, and just then, according to his story, some oystermen came along in a skipjack, and one of them recognized the boat, and told him where she belonged. He said that he examined her, and finding that nothing was the matter with her, he started the engines and brought her back to me. That was his story."

"Was he taking a morning walk out there on the Sound that he happened to find her?" asked the detective, with a smile.

"That was what I asked him; but he said that he was a guest aboard a yacht that was passing when they discovered the launch."

"Oh!"

"And that he wanted to get ashore, anyhow, so, as this island was on the way to the shore, he thought he would bring the boat to me and then get me to set him ashore."

"Did you do it?"

"Yes."

"Where did you take him?"

"I landed him at Dorlan's Point; right across there."

"Did you see the yacht that he talked about having left, when he found your boat?"

"I did not."

"Did you notice any yacht at all, out in that direction?"

"Not such a one as he described—a big steam-yacht which didn't want to come into the shoal water of this harbor. The *Priscilla* could come in here if she wanted to, so it must have been a pretty big yacht."

"Yes."

"And that wasn't all that was fishy about his story, either."

"No? What else?"

"If my launch had really broken away from her moorings and drifted, neither the wind nor the tide would have taken here where he said he found her."

"Did you suggest that idea to him?"

"No. I didn't think about it till after I had put him ashore, and he had gone. It was too late then."

"What is your present impression about the matter, Mr. Wickiup?"

"My present impression is about this: I think that somebody came to this island in a rowboat, some time during the night; somebody had use for a launch, and somebody cut the rope and then frayed off the end so it would appear as if it had worn away. After that, they must have towed the boat far enough away so that I wouldn't notice her when they started the engine; but what I can't understand is, what they came all the way out here to get a boat for, when there is any quantity of them in the harbor that might have been taken easier than they got her."

"Possibly they did not come from the harbor."

"Then, where did they come from?"

"Perhaps from the yacht he told about."

"I don't believe there was any yacht, Mr. Carter."

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing, I didn't see anything that looked as if it might have been the yacht he talked about; for another, I never heard of a yacht named the *Skiddoo*, which he said was her name; for another, if they had a yacht, what in the world did they want of my launch, do you suppose?"

"Possibly to go into shallow water."

"But who ever heard of a yacht of the size he described, that didn't have a tender with her?"

"Such a yacht certainly ought to carry not one, but two or three," replied Nick.

"Sure."

"Was the man quite alone?"

"Yes."

"And where was he when you first discovered him as he approached this island?"

Mr. Wickiup turned about on his heel and pointed to-

ward a bare, but green, island, which loomed rather high out of the water directly to the south of where they were standing.

"Do you see that island, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"When I first saw the man in my launch, he was just rounding the western end of that island. He must have been behind it until that moment; or—*he may have come from that island itself.*"

"What is there on that island?"

"Nothing."

"Eh? Nothing?"

"Nothing but grass, a few stunted trees, some good soil, a good spring of water, and an old watch-house which is built of stone and which stands down in a sort of hollow so that you cannot see it from here."

"How big is the island?"

"Twenty acres—a little more, possibly."

"Who owns it?"

"The same man who owns this one, and three others around here. That, and that, and that," and he pointed in several directions.

"Does anybody live in the stone watch-house you have referred to?"

"No, sir."

"Does anybody ever stay on that island at all?"

"Not now. It has been hired for the season, though."

"Hired for the season?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"I don't know. Somebody from the city. Mr. Jones, who owns these islands, told me about it the other day, and I took the party out there. They are going to use the old stone cottage and some tents, I believe; but they are not there yet."

"Unless they arrived in the night," said Nick. "About the time your launch went adrift. Eh?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERY GROWS DEEPER.

Mr. Wickiup stared at the detective a moment, and then quite abruptly he said:

"Let us take a run out there and find out, will you?"

"Certainly," replied the detective; and in a moment more they were speeding toward the island in question.

Its shore is rather abrupt. It rises directly from the water to a height of ten feet or more in most places, although there is afforded sufficient opportunity to make a landing.

But the aspect of the island, when once they were well upon it, was exactly as Wickiup had described it, and nowhere did it give any evidence of occupancy.

The stone cottage which had been mentioned by the owner of the launch was a low and somewhat rambling affair, built of the stones which might be picked up around the shore, and it contained three rooms, one of which was securely locked against intrusion.

"What is inside this room?" asked the detective of his guide.

"I don't know," was the reply. "I believe that the men who have hired the use of the island brought some things out here while I was away. If so, that is where they have locked them up."

"Would there be any objection if I should unlock the door and take a peep inside?" asked Nick.

"I don't know. I think not. Can you unlock it?"

"Certainly. With ease."

With his little instrument, invented for that purpose, Nick was only a moment in opening the door; but when he pushed it aside and stepped across the threshold, he beheld nothing but an empty room.

"There is nothing there, after all," said Wickiup, now plainly nervous. "Come away, Mr. Carter, please. I don't know that I did exactly right in permitting the door to be opened. I am glad that there is nothing there."

"All the same," said Nick, "I would like to search the inside of the room."

"I would rather you would not," said Wickiup. "There is nothing there. It would do no good."

Nick permitted himself to be drawn away from the door and out of the house, for his guide paused only long enough for him to relock the door.

There was nothing more to be seen on the island, and so the party took their way toward the launch.

During all this time, as well as when Nick had talked with Wickiup on the other island, the two dogs had remained on the launch; but now, as he approached it in company with Wickiup, Pedro saw him, and with one big leap he sprang into the water and waded ashore.

And Bruce, seeing the act, did likewise, while Nick, perceiving them, stopped in his tracks and waited.

"Hold on a minute, Mr. Wickiup," he said. "Let the dogs have a five minutes' run over the island. It will do them good. They have been cramped up in the boat a long time."

The two men seated themselves on the grass and lighted cigars; and then, as the dogs approached, Nick called out to them:

"Hunt 'em up, Bruce! Go find 'em, Pedro! Find Nan! Find Nan!"

Bruce cocked his head to one side, and seemed to study the expression of the detective's face for a moment, as if he were in doubt about the earnestness of the order; but Pedro dropped his nose to the ground instantly, and started at once on that circling trot which only a bloodhound uses when it is searching for a lost trail.

Wickiup watched them earnestly for some time, and then he turned to Nick.

"You haven't told me yet about your part of the mystery, Mr. Carter," he said.

"My part of the mystery is that your launch was, this morning, before daylight, ashore at a point on the Sound half-way between Mamaroneck and Harrison's, and that at least four men embarked in her from there. I had been trailing some people from the city, and it was my big bloodhound, there, that did the trailing."

"But——"

"Wait a moment. The other dog, the one I just now called Bruce, had followed those people from the city, and it was by keeping his track that Pedro was able to pursue them.

"When we arrived at the shore of the Sound, and while I was turning over in my mind what best to do, that clam-digger in the boat came along and said that long before daylight, as he was passing that way, he had seen four men leave the shore in your boat. He knew the boat, and knew to whom it belonged."

"The man himself belongs in Norwalk, or did until not long ago, so there is nothing remarkable about his recognition of the launch."

"No. The white dog had attempted to follow the launch even after it was well off the shore, and he came swimming back to me while I stood there. He was exhausted and nearly drowned.

"Later, I traced the boat here. It had disappeared mysteriously from your anchorage, and been returned quite as mysteriously.

"It came to you apparently from the open Sound. There was only one man in it where there should have been four, to say nothing of a woman who also should have been with them.

"Now, there is my part of the mystery, Mr.——"

He ceased speaking suddenly, for a long-drawn-out cry from the bloodhound announced as plainly as words in the English language could have done that a scent had been found.

The detective sprang to his feet.

He did not wait to say a word to Wickiup, but dashed away toward the dogs, where he could see Pedro circling rapidly with his nose close to the ground and every once in awhile uttering that long bay which was his never-to-be-mistaken signal of a scent discovered.

Wickiup had followed the detective, and now he asked:

"What is it, Mr. Carter?"

"The bloodhound has struck the scent," replied Nick.

"What scent?"

"The trail of the woman to whom I referred."

"Is she a fugitive from justice—that woman?"

"No; she is a victim of injustice. She has fallen into the hands of the Philistines, and I am seeking to rescue her."

"But do you mean to say that the actions of the dog indicate that she has been upon this island?"

"They certainly do."

Nick had been watching Pedro narrowly all this time, and now he added:

"She has been on the island, but I do not think that she did more than wait here to be taken off again. If you will notice the dog, you will see that he has unmistakably discovered her track; but that he only follows it a few feet."

"Yes."

"Then his nose goes into the air, and after a little he returns to his starting-point."

"What does that indicate?"

"Either that she has gone no farther, or that she has been carried."

"But there is no place on this island where she could go—at least, there is no place where she could have been hidden away."

"So I perceive. That is why I suggested that probably she remained here only while her captors were awaiting the arrival of another boat to take them off."

"And that, you think, might have been about the time when the stranger brought my launch back to me?"

"No. I think it was considerably before that time. Excuse me a moment."

The detective walked over to the spot where Pedro was still struggling with that baffling scent.

"Come here, Pedro," he said, and the dog instantly obeyed.

"Now, boy," said the detective, "I am going to try a new trick with you. I am going to try to make you take a fresh scent. I wonder if you will do it, if you find one? The only trouble is that if you do not take a trail, I will never know whether there was one there or not, and if you do, I shall not know whether it is one that I care about or not. However, I will try it."

He motioned to Wickiup to stand back a few paces from where he was, and then, leading the dog by a detour, half-way to the stone cottage, he loosed him again.

"Go find!" he said; and waited.

The dog waited, also, until he repeated the order, and then, with his nose to the ground, he started on a swift run toward the spot where he had found the scent at first.

But the detective called him back.

"No, Pedro," he said. "Not there. Go find! Go find!"

Again the dog hesitated; again he started for the original place, and again he was called back; and still again the detective repeated his order.

And this time Pedro understood, or thought he did, for he did not again attempt to approach the shore where he had first found the scent, but he began to search

diligently among the grass near where they were standing.

The detective stood with folded arms watching him until at last Pedro stopped, seemed to hesitate, as if in doubt, raised his head, and was on the point of uttering his well known cry, when he changed his mind, and remained silent.

Nick watched him without moving, and after a moment Pedro put his nose to the ground again.

Once more he went through all the motions of having found a scent which he felt sure was not the right one; and then he calmly looked around at the detective and wagged his tail twice, as if to say:

"I have found a scent, but not *the* scent. I know it is not the right one, so what shall I do about it?"

The detective replied, as if the dog had spoken intelligible words.

"Follow," he called out. "Go find!"

Pedro did not require a second order after that.

He uttered his signal-cry, and with nose to the ground started away at once, on a bee-line toward the stone cottage.

"Come," said the detective to his companion. "Let us see what he will do there."

"What track has he got now?" asked Wickiup.

"I can answer that only negatively," replied the detective. "He is on the track of some person he does not know; of some person who is *not* the one whose scent he struck down there near the shore, but of a person who was evidently one of that party."

"See," said Wickiup. "The dog is at the cottage door."

"So I perceive."

"He is trying to get inside."

"We will let him in in a moment, just to see what he will do."

"There isn't anything there. We know that, don't we?"

"Yes, we know that; but the dog has told us something that we did not know, and that is that somebody has been there quite recently."

"The men who had my boat?"

"Yes; and the men who abducted the young woman I am in search of."

"They are the same, of course, aren't they?"

"There can be no doubt of that."

"But why have they been to this cottage?"

"I cannot reply to that question yet, Mr. Wickiup. One member of the party may have gone to the cottage merely out of curiosity—to take a look at it; or there may have been another and much more weighty reason."

As he made this remark, the detective threw open the door of the cottage, permitting Pedro to enter, and without an instant of hesitation, the dog dashed at once across the dimly lighted room, straight to the door before described, which the detective had unlocked and then locked again.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HAUNTED ISLAND.

The detective and his companion were silent, for each was surprised at what had happened.

Each remembered that the door through which they had just admitted the bloodhound had been securely locked when they first arrived at the cottage, and the presumption was that it had been in the same condition at the time of the visit of the strangers whose tracks Pedro had scented out on the island.

The question that was disturbing the detective during that moment of indecision was: "Had the strangers possessed a key to that door?"

If such a key were in the possession of one of them, why did he have it, and where had he procured it?

But, after all, it resolved itself to the more pertinent and material question: Why had it been thought necessary for them to visit the island at all?

But the detective realized all the time that the wonderful scent of the dog did not deceive him. He knew as well as if he had seen them, that the strangers had been there; that the persons, whoever they were, who had carried off Nancy, had been upon that island and had brought her there with them.

And yet, the island was bare; the house was bare; and the locked room was bare.

The detective stepped inside, and, crossing the room, threw open the shutters at one of the two windows; and then he spent some moments in a cursory examination of the interior of the room.

No further description than has already been given is necessary.

The room contained nothing at all—save dust; and even that was not thick enough to have left tracks upon the thick, rough, and rather uneven oaken floor.

Nick gave some extra attention to the floor, but it told him nothing.

He half-expected at first that it would contain a trap-door of some kind, but a glance was sufficient to tell him that this was not so.

Nor was there a ceiling above it; only the rafters of the house against which the roof had been laid.

He closed the shutters again after a moment, and drew down the window.

Then he spoke to Pedro, and they all withdrew from the room, while Nick again closed and locked the door.

"What do you make of it, Mr. Carter?" Wickiup asked when they were again outside.

"Nothing at all," replied the detective.

"But how do you account for the dog's actions?"

"By reasoning that the strange visitors to this island were actuated by the same impulses that we were, when they visited the house, and opened the one locked door that was discovered."

"But why should they visit this island at all?"

"That is the puzzle. The only answer that is at all adequate to the circumstance is that they used it for a place of rendezvous; as a spot where they were to meet each other. There must indeed have been another yacht, as the stranger who returned your boat said there was."

"But," said Wickiup, "if you will excuse me, I don't understand why he should have taken the trouble to return my boat at all. I don't even see why he should have stolen the boat for such a journey as the one you have described, if he had at hand a larger yacht. It is a number of miles from here to the spot where they made their landing, between Mamaroneck and Harrison's. There is plenty of water there. They did not require a small boat like mine. A larger one would have answered their purposes."

"There is only one answer to it all," replied the detective. "It seems rather absurd on the face of it, and yet, it is the only explanation."

"What is it, if I may ask?"

"Mind, I am only guessing at it."

"Yes."

"We will say, then, that this island was their selected place of rendezvous; that late during the afternoon or early in the evening of yesterday one or two of the party landed upon this island. If the landing was made from the Sound side of it, they would not have been observed."

"No."

"We will say that some sort of a craft was expected here, but when she did not arrive, it was remembered that you had a launch anchored over at your island which would answer their purposes very well.

"We will say that if there were two men in that party they rowed over together and stole your launch; that they towed her far enough away from your island so you would not hear the engine when they started it."

"Yes."

"Having started it, one of them remained in the launch and headed for the place of meeting, near Harrison's, while the other one returned to this island in the rowboat, and waited for the arrival of the yacht that was late.

"And now, you must remember what I have told you about my chase after them in the city, or, rather, from the city."

"Yes."

"They had more than three hours' start of me; they could travel much faster than I could, especially after they made the change from the carriage to the automobile.

"They arrived at Harrison's about two o'clock in the morning, while there was still a very respectable moon shining; and it was because the clam-digger was getting an early start that he happened to see them.

"I arrived on the scene of their departure from the shore about five—that is, about the time they must have reached this island. It was not long after that when the boat was returned to you, was it?"

"No; but right there is another point."

"What is it?"

"Why should he have taken the trouble to return the boat at all? After having been to all the pains they were to make it appear that the buoy-rope had frayed, or chafed off, why not have set the boat adrift for me to find as I could?"

"There are two answers to that," replied Nick.

"What are they?"

"One is that it was already daylight, or so near to it that there was danger of discovery, or, at least, of partial discovery, which might have interfered with their plans; the other is, that the man who did return your launch to you so boldly really wished to be put ashore without interfering with the plans already made for the others of his party, and he selected that course to accomplish it."

"It seems rather far-fetched, doesn't it?"

"The whole thing seems far-fetched, if you go into that, Wickiup."

"Well, anyhow, Mr. Carter, it is pretty certain that they are not here now, isn't it?"

"It certainly would seem so—yes."

"What shall you do now?"

"I think," replied the detective, smiling, "that for the present I will return to your island with you and try to induce you to give me some breakfast."

"Good! I can do that. Come along."

They moved solwly across the island toward the boat, and neither of them noticed that although Pedro, the bloodhound, followed closely at their heels, Bruce, the wolfhound, lingered at the door of the cottage, gazing wistfully after them.

Nick did not discover Bruce's absence until he was about to enter the skipjack; but then he turned and called to him.

"Come, Bruce, old fellow!" he called.

Bruce wagged his tail in token that he heard and understood; but he did not budge nor offer to obey.

"That is odd," murmured the detective; and he called the dog again.

The demeanor of Bruce remained the same. He did not offer to obey, although it was plain that he understood.

"Why in the world do you suppose he wants to remain here?" asked Wickiup.

"That is hard to tell," replied the detective. "It may

be that, having scented his mistress on this island, he believes that she is still here, and refuses to leave on that account. That seems to be the only answer."

He called to the dog a third time, and then walked part of the way back toward the cottage; and after a moment Bruce came to him on a run, contorting himself after the fashion that is described by the saying that the tail wags the dog.

Nick patted him on the head, talked to him a moment, and then turned to retrace his steps to the boat again.

But Bruce stopped in his tracks and would go no farther; and after a moment he trotted leisurely back to the door of the cottage, where he deliberately stretched himself on the ground before the door, and, with his nose between his paws, looked at the detective as if to say that he had decided to remain there where he was, no matter what happened.

The detective turned then to his companion.

"It isn't far from here to your island," he said tentatively.

"No. Less than half a mile."

"The dog can easily swim that far."

"Sure."

"We will leave him here for the present, then. If he hasn't followed us by the time we have had our breakfast, we will return for him."

But Bruce did not offer to move, even when the skipjack put out from the shore into the water.

He remained as they had left him, with his head between his paws, as if he had elected to remain on that island for the rest of his life.

It was not until the party arrived at the other island and had left the boat, closely followed this time by the clam-digger and his friend who owned the skipjack, that Nick took any notice at all of the fact that neither of these men had followed them ashore on the other island.

They had both remained in the boat; neither had offered to leave it; and now, as they all walked toward the cottage where Mr. Wickiup said he would soon provide breakfast for them, the detective held back and motioned to the clam-digger to join him.

"I have heard your friend call you Ben," he said. "Is that your name?"

"Yep."

"I noticed that you didn't go ashore with us on that other island, Ben."

"Not on your life, sir. No, sirree! Not by a jugful, we didn't!"

"Why not?"

"That there island is ha'nted; that's why."

"Haunted?"

"Ye-as; ha'nted."

"By what?"

"Spooks."

"What kind of spooks?"

"That there question I don't purtend to answer, sir. I ain't got no dead reckonin' on spooks, and I ain't never seen more'n one kind—and that's them. There's some folks around here as don't believe it, but I do. That there island has been ha'nted always. My father told me about it when I was a boy, and f'r a long time I didn't believe it any more'n some of the others do; but I want to tell you that I *know* it's ha'nted because I've seen 'em."

"Seen what?"

"The spooks. I wouldn't put a foot on that there island, nohow; not for ginger, I wouldn't; and no more would Sam, who owns the skipjack. We ain't a-goin' back there with you, either—not for ten dollars. Look here, sir, d'ye think we want to be ha'nted same as that dog is? Why d'ye s'pose he wouldn't come when you called him? I'll tell you why. It's 'cause he's ha'nted, and the spooks wouldn't let him."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPIRITS OF THE ISLAND.

Here was food for thought!

While breakfast was in preparation, Nick drew Ben to one side and finally walked with him across the island to its south shore, from which point they could keep watch of the other island which the clam-digger chose to say was haunted.

"Tell me all about it, Ben," the detective said to him.

Ben hesitated a long time before he replied; but at last he said:

"Mr. Carter, I take it, from what has been said in my presence, that you are an officer. Is that right?"

"I am a detective—not a police officer."

"You ain't got no call of any kind to interfere with my business, have you?"

"Not in the least."

"Nor Sam's?"

"Certainly not."

"'Cause why? Well, you see, we ain't always clam-diggers. Sometimes we're what is called around here oyster pirates. Pickin' up oyster seeds and sellin' 'em sometimes brings in a purty fair profit, and when it's done, it has got to be mostly done at night. I suppose you understand that, sir?"

"Yes."

"If you ain't a-goin' to call me down for anything that I have been doin' around here at night, and ain't goin' to repeat what I tell you, I'll—well, I'll tell you about that island, sir."

"That's a bargain, Ben."

"Well, the island is ha'nted."

"You said that before."

"By spooks."

"You said that, also."

"And by spooks as does queer things."

"Tell me what you have seen them do."

"I have seen—in the middle of the night, or airly in the morning—a sheet of red fire shoot up into the sky over the middle of the island, same as if there was a red-hot furnace there, and somebody opened the door to shovel coal inside of it. That's one thing."

"Yes."

"One night when I was tongin' for seed along this shore of it, I seen two or three glimmers uh light over the top of the island, and I thought I heard voices. I wasn't so scairt then as I am now about it, and I went ashore and crawled up to the top uh the bank from where I could look over into the holler where the stone cottage is."

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, sir, when I first peeked over the top of that ridge the fust thing I noticed was that every winder in that cottage was a-blazin' with light; and while I was a-lookin' I could see figgers a-glidin' around there, too. Some was in white and some warn't; some was half in white and half in black—and then, all of a suddint, while a-lookin', every cussed light went out like you would blow out a candle, and there wasn't a sight nor a sound to tell that I had seen anything at all.

"That was a good while ago—mebby two or three years. Anyhow, when daylight came and the sun was up, I went ashore on that island, and I went to the cottage all alone, just to look around, for at that time I didn't believe that what I had seen was spooks no more'n you do now."

"And you found—what?"

"Nothin'."

"What?"

"Nothin', I tell you. The cottage was bare. There wasn't no sign that anybody had been there, either. There wasn't no trace of a fire, or of men. I didn't stop no longer than was necessary to find that out, but I made tracks for the boat—and thank my stars I'm alive to-day. I ain't never set foot on that island since."

"But you have seen and heard other things there, have you?"

"Seen 'em, yes; heard 'em, no."

"What have you seen?"

"Jest what I told you. Lights over the island—lights that didn't proceed from the shore, or from ships in the Sound, as other folks thinks, too, 'cause I've rowed all around the island at such times and seen the lights from every side."

"They came from the vicinity of the cottage, eh?"

"Ye-us. From the middle of the island, and that's where the cottage is. You see, sir, other folks has seen them lights, as well as me, but you take the case of Mr. Wicklup, for instance."

"Yes."

"When he sees 'em, he sees 'em from this island, and he thinks they come from some boat that is passin' on the other side of the island. When folks out on the Sound sees 'em, they think they come from some place on the shore, and none of 'em pays any attention to them. But I have seen 'em from all sides of the island, and rowed around it while I was a-watchin' 'em, *and I know that they came from the island itself.*"

"When was the first time that you saw anything of the kind, Ben?"

"Maybe it was four or five years ago."

"And when was the last time?"

"Less'n two weeks ago; jest afore I went to Mamaroneck to live."

"Have you noticed these exhibitions right along, from time to time, ever since the first time you noticed one at all?"

"Well, sir, I've seen 'em a good many times. Sometimes there'd be a month from one time to another. Sometimes several months—and there was a space of about three years or more when I didn't see 'em at all."

"Do clam-diggers and oystermen land on the island much now?"

"They uster; but they don't no more. They all believe as I do about it."

"Don't you think that some of the oyster pirates may be using the island for a——"

"No, I don't! Excuse me for interruptin', but it ain't possible. I know every oyster pirate from Hell Gate to New London, purty near, and I know that none of them go there."

"Have you ever seen strangers land there?"

"Sometimes; but they're mostly folks as is jest a-looking around the harbor, or boys that are a-picnickin'. Once there was three boys that went there with a tent to camp out—but they didn't stay there."

"Why not?"

"The spooks drove 'em away."

"Tell me about it."

"They were boys as belonged to my class, sir. Clammers' boys and oystermen's boys. They never made no noise about what happened, but I know about it."

"Tell me."

"They heard all sorts of noises around 'em in the night. Once, while they were asleep, all four of 'em was doused with water and more water was thrown on their fire, puttin' it out kerslap."

"What did they do?"

"Well, they didn't stand around, guessin' what had happened. They made tracks jest as fast as they could with their heels toward the spooks; and when they got to their boat, it was adrift, and one of 'em had to swim out to it—and they swore that they had pulled it high and dry out of the water at high tide, too."

"Are you sure that your father told you all about all this when you were a boy, Ben?"

"Yes, sirree."

"You haven't imagined that, and got to believe it yourself, eh?"

"He told me about it when I wasn't more'n sixteen."

"Was his story like that which you have told me?"

"Something like it; only he used to say that the island was ha'nted only about jest so often."

"What did he mean by that?"

"He used to see the spooks about once a month. Then there'd be lights there, and figgers a-scootin' around in the dark, and queer noises, and all that."

"That must have been almost fifty years ago, Ben."

"All o' that; and his father seen them things afore *his* time, too."

"What! Your grandfather?"

"Ye-us."

"By that it would appear that the island has been haunted about a hundred years."

"I guess it's been ha'nted allers, sir."

They were interrupted at this moment by the call to breakfast, but as soon as the meal was finished, Nick called Wickiup aside with him.

"Have you heard anything about that island, as being haunted?" he asked him.

Wickiup threw back his head and laughed.

"Sure," he said. "It is the general belief among the oystermen and clammers around here, Mr. Carter."

"Have you ever seen any of those strange lights which the clammer describes?"

"Sure. Everybody has seen them—and everybody knows what they are, except a few that are afraid of ghosts."

"What are they?"

"From here, they are lights from a passing steamer. From the Sound side, they are lights from the shore. Look out that way now. There is a steamer passing on the other side of the island; doesn't the smoke from the funnels look as if there was a fire on the island to make it?"

"It does."

"Well, that smoke is a mile or so farther away from us than the island. Often when I am ashore I will be told that there is a fire here; that one of our cottages is burning. I only laugh. It is always a passing steamer."

"Ben says that he has rowed all the way around the island at times when he has seen such lights, and has seen them from every side."

"You can depend upon it that Ben lies, then. He would be too scared to do that, anyhow."

"Of course, Mr. Wickiup, you do not believe for a moment that the island is haunted; but do you suppose it is possible that those lights might have been made by persons who were actually on the island?"

"No; I do not."

"Have you ever heard about the boys who were frightened away from there?"

"Yes. They dreamed it; or, what is more likely, they lost their nerve and told that story afterward as an excuse for leaving the island. They didn't wish it to appear that they were afraid without giving a good reason for their fears."

"Do you know how old that cottage is?"

"Nobody knows that. It has stood there within the recollection of the oldest resident around here."

"A hundred years, or more, then."

"Yes; in all probability more."

"Have you ever made a thorough search of the interior of that cottage?"

"No. I never more than looked inside of it till today. But there isn't anything to search, is there? We saw all there is to be seen, didn't we?"

"It would seem so. All the same——"

"Well?"

"If you will lend me a rowboat, I think I will row over there and get the dog we left behind us."

"Sure. I'll go with you, if——"

"No. I won't take your time; and, besides, I want to moon around there alone."

CHAPTER X.

THE OLD STONE COTTAGE'S SECRET.

The detective purposely left the bloodhound behind when he departed in the rowboat for the haunted island.

His reason for doing this was that the actions of Bruce, when he was left behind, had interested him more than he had admitted at the time, and he knew that he could better study the actions of the wolfhound without the interference of Pedro.

Their natures were entirely different.

Pedro recognized only one duty, aside from that to his master, and that was the pursuit of a scent.

One dog will always interfere with another, unless they have been trained to work together, and Nick desired especially now the opportunity to study Bruce and to discover, if possible, just why he had insisted upon remaining on the island alone.

It was not because he had found the scent of his mistress and lost it there, Nick believed; but, rather, it must be because he had some good instinctive reason for believing that she was still there.

The horrible thought came to him that Nancy might have been murdered and buried there, on the island; but he dismissed it at once, because his reason told him that if such had been the case, Pedro would have led them to the grave at once.

That Nan had been on the island that morning, the detective felt assured; but that she had not walked farther inland than the nose of Pedro had indicated, he was certain.

If she had proceeded farther than that, she had been carried.

The possibility that she could still be on that island, concealed somewhere, was absurd on the face of it; and yet——

He stopped there.

He regretted, too, that at the time he was on the island accompanied by the two dogs, he had entirely neglected to study the actions of Bruce. His whole attention had been taken up in watching the bloodhound, and no thought whatever had been given to the dog that had once belonged to Nan.

And then, too, his mind went back to the strange manner in which Bruce had come to him, and to the conjectures he had had on the subject at the time, and following upon it.

"Jimmy Duryea, the gentleman crook, would never have sent that dog to me for the purpose of carrying out any such scheme as this one," he thought aloud, for he was alone in the boat. "The dog had absolutely nothing to do with the abduction of Nan. He was not a party to it, and in no manner a help to it; rather, he was a hindrance, and one of which the abductors tried to rid themselves. It is a very odd circumstance all around."

When he landed upon the island, it appeared that Bruce had been watching his approach, for the dog ran at once to the shore to meet him, uttering joyful barks, which were almost yelps, as he came.

When Nick pulled the boat out of the reach of the tide and then strolled slowly toward the cottage, Bruce capered along at his side, manifesting in every way possible to a dog the delight he felt.

"What is it?" Nick said to him. "What are you trying to tell me, old fellow?"

The dog stopped still in his tracks and looked up into the detective's face with what one might call a "speaking expression"; and yet, it was all an enigma to the detective.

Then he darted away at a full run, and thus continued to the shore at the south side of the island, where Nick believed that Pedro had first scented the presence of Nancy on the island.

Here the dog darted to the edge of the water and back again several times, stopping each time that he arrived at the farthest point from the shore, and always in the same place; and here each time he raised his head and looked toward the detective, while he wagged his tail with energy.

He did this several times, going through exactly the same performance each time; and then he darted swiftly toward the cottage, entered at the open door, and, having crossed the threshold, stopped again, raised his head, and barked; just one short, sharp, quick bark.

"You are trying to tell me something, aren't you?" said the detective. "I wonder what it is?"

The dog, as if he understood perfectly the words the detective had uttered, ran again to the shore, and in every detail he repeated the performance he had just concluded; that is, he ran to and from the shore several times, and then he returned to the cottage, crossed the sill of the door, stopped there, and uttered that same short bark.

"I think I understand," said the detective, then. "You are trying to tell me that you can scent the trail of Nancy's steps, down there by the shore; that you lose them at the point where you stopped each time; but that when you get here, to this place, you find them again.

"Now, if that is true, what does it indicate?

"Plainly, there are several answers to that question.

"One is—and it seems to be the most probable one—that when the party landed on this beach, Nan was brought ashore, and she collapsed—fainted, or something like that. She had evidently been lying in the bottom of the launch, for Ben did not see her when he saw the four men.

"Out here on the shore she must have fainted, or have been too weak to stand, for some reason; so she was picked up and carried to this cottage, for shelter.

"We will accept this much as true, anyhow, Bruce: That Nancy has been inside this cottage, and that that is what you are trying to tell me. What I do not understand is, why you should have insisted upon remaining here. It cannot be that you believe her to be here still."

Bruce wagged his tail and gazed steadfastly into the detective's eyes.

"Is that what you mean, Bruce?"

Bruce uttered a short bark, as if he understood; but the trouble was that the detective was not sure that he had understood.

Nick turned away.

He walked some distance from the cottage and seated himself upon a rock, facing it.

"What am I to make out of that story about the island being haunted?" he asked himself, at once forgetting the presence of the dog. "There is some distinct reason for that story. Ben is not the only one who regards the island as haunted. Others have thought so; others think so still.

"Others have seen the things that Ben describes. Even Wickiup confesses to having seen them, but attributes them to lights that were beyond and above the island.

"Ben says that the island has been supposed to be haunted for many years. I haven't time to investigate that part of his story, but I must conclude that it is true.

"Let me see. This is about the region of the Pequot Indian war. These are the islands that are mentioned in history as the 'Indian islands.' Some of them, I remember, were regarded as sacred by the Indians, and were used as burial-places for their dead.

"I wonder——"

Whatever it was that he wondered, he did not give expression to it, but, rising again to his feet, he approached the cottage again; and now he passed all around it on the outside.

It was rudely constructed. The material was of huge, flat stones, almost too large for a man or for several men to lift.

They had been selected and fitted together with a degree of nicety that was amazing, and so perfectly had it been done that no plaster of any sort had been required.

Still, there were places where the detective could see that mud had been used to stop some of the cracks, or to fill in indentures in the stones.

But their size and shape explained why the building had stood so long; that is, the side walls did. The roof was modern, although in an advanced stage of decay in some places.

He passed around again to the door, and entered.

He remembered that the floor of the locked room was of oak, but he noticed now that the flooring of the other two rooms was pine.

He opened the locked door again, and passed inside of that room.

Yes, the floor was of oak; hewn oak, too.

He walked across it and stamped upon it heavily, but it gave back only the solid sound that might have been expected.

While he was doing this, his attention was attracted again to the dog.

Bruce seemed to express delight in every curve of his lithe body. He could not keep it still. He walked around and around the detective, watching him as if he expected to see him stamp a hole through the floor.

When the detective stopped, the dog did likewise.

When Nick moved, the dog moved with him.

When the detective looked at him, he inevitably crossed solemnly toward the partition which separated that room from the remaining two, and smelled industriously at a certain spot.

He did this several times, and at last Nick bent over at that spot and examined the wall carefully.

But it was composed apparently of solid boards, or planks; oak planks; hewn planks, like the floor; and the partition ascended only far enough to divide the rooms. It did not go to the roof, and it will be remembered that there was no ceiling.

A person speaking in one room might readily be heard in the others. A light shining in one room would shed some of its glow into each of the others.

Nevertheless, the dog was unmistakably interested in that part of the wall, or partition. He manifested it in more ways than one. He wagged his tail while the detective was there, and he drooped and looked disappointed when the detective walked away.

And each time that that happened, Bruce returned to the wall and sniffed again at the boards.

"There is something doing in connection with that partition," said Nick at last. "Now, what can it be?"

He returned to the door and began to study the partition itself; and instantly he made a discovery that had hitherto escaped his observation.

The partition was not straight. On the side of the outer room it was directed at an angle toward the end wall of the building, tending toward the front; on the side of the inner room—the room that had been locked, the angle was directed the other way. The result was that there were really two partitions which formed an acute angle, and which were the same as if a huge letter V had been laid flat on its face.

"And the point at which Bruce has been sniffing is at the widest part of that V," exclaimed the detective.

He crossed to the windows now and opened wide every one of them, throwing the shutters back, in order to admit every ray of light that was possible.

And now, Bruce, as if he comprehended the detective's thought, was leaping around the room with every manifestation of delight, while Nick stood on the threshold of the door which connected the two rooms, studying and thinking.

"I wonder," he was thinking, "if I have hit upon a mare's nest? Stranger things have happened than if I should find some kind of a dug-out storehouse underneath this old stone cottage.

"Such a place may have been originally created by the Indians, for a tomb. It might later have been used by the colonials, for smuggling purposes. Later, still, the Tories may have used it for storing hidden arms and ammunition. And still later, it may have been discovered, or remembered, by the descendants of some of them, and made use of for illegal purposes.

"Such a place would be an ideal one as a rendezvous for crooks, or as a storehouse for the proceeds of burglaries. It would be even better as a den for the manufacture of spurious coin, or counterfeit money."

He laughed somewhat grimly, and added:

"One would think that I were writing a romance—or reading one: but, all the same, I have found stranger things than that would be.

"I think, Bruce, at the risk of offending the owner of this island, I'll at least remove one of the planks of that partition, and see what is behind it."

CHAPTER XI.

A PRISONER OF THE SPOOKS.

The detective stood before the partition a long time, studying it.

"I should have brought an ax or a crowbar here with me," he thought. "It will take one or the other to pry a plank from that partition."

He was speaking aloud, and presently he added:

"I might smash it in with a rock, and I guess that is just what I will have to do. Ho, for a rock! A mighty rock!" he laughed; and then he passed outside the cottage to procure one.

Presently he returned with one that would weigh about forty pounds, and with this in his grasp, he backed off a little way from the planks, and, raising it high above his head, he hurled it with all his strength at the oak partition.

The effect was immediate—instantaneous; but not at all what he had expected it would be.

The crash of the impact still rang in his ears; he had not yet recovered his equilibrium from the effort he had used in hurling the rock, when a section of the partition shot upward toward the ceiling, leaving an aperture as wide and almost as high as a door, and from this hidden place three men sprang out upon him.

And as they leaped toward him one of them threw something into his eyes which blinded him for an instant, and which made him feel as if he had plunged into fire; and while he staggered back from the attack the men seized him, a blanket was dropped over his head, a heavy blow fell upon him, delivered by some blunt instrument, and he sank to the floor, not exactly unconscious, but so dazed by what had happened that he was only dimly aware of what was taking place.

And then strange things happened; stranger than any he had ever experienced before.

The blanket over his head was drawn tightly around him. Ropes were wound round and round that until he was trieed up so that he could not move arms or legs.

Next he felt a hand sliding over his face, outside the blanket, and, after a moment, when that investigating hand had discovered the locality of his nose and mouth, a slit was cut in the blanket.

He was still dazed; still only half-conscious, and yet also half-realizing what was taking place, but with no power of resistance.

Then he smelled something that was sweet and pungent.

He knew, with indefinite vagueness, that it was chloroform, but he could not have resisted inhaling it if he had tried; and, inhaling it, he presently lost all memory of his surroundings.

And then a blank.

* * * * * * *

Over on the other island, when hour after hour went past and there was no sign of the return of the detective, Mr. Wickiup became visibly uneasy, and Ben, the clam-digger, made no effort to hide his firm conviction that Nick Carter had deliberately gone to his doom.

When the afternoon was far advanced, Wickiup walked down to the south shore of his own island for the tenth

time and looked across the stretch of water toward the other one.

He could see the boat, drawn high upon the shore, which the detective had used in passing from one island to the other, but he could discover nothing of the dog or of Nick Carter.

"I'm not going to wait any longer," he said aloud. "I'm going over there."

"Then you'll go alone," replied Ben, who had followed him. "If you want to take your life in your hands by going to that place, you don't get me to go with you."

"Nobody has asked you," was the rather short reply. "You can land me on the beach, can't you, and then wait till I look around?"

"Yes"—reluctantly—"I can do that. Me and Sam will do that. But we won't neither of us set foot on the shore; not for ginger, Mister Wickiup!"

"All right. Come ahead, then."

They embarked once more in the skipjack, and a little later Wickiup leaped to the shore of the mysterious island, and hastened over the ridge toward the cottage.

As he went forward, he called out:

"Carter! I say, Carter! *Mis-ter Car-ter!*"

But there was no answer.

Then he remembered the name of the dog, and he called again:

"Bruce! Bruce! Mis-ter Car-ter!"

The sound of his voice must have penetrated half-way to Norwalk; but still there was no reply.

He hurried to the cottage and entered it.

It was exactly in the condition in which he had seen it last.

The outside door was half-open; the door leading from that room into one of the others was locked, as it had been when he and the detective first entered the cottage that morning.

But there was no sign of Nick Carter or of the dog anywhere to be found.

Wickiup was rapidly becoming—not exactly frightened, because he was not built that way—but intensely puzzled and worried.

That something had happened, there was no doubt—but what could it have been?

Where was Nick Carter? Where was the dog?

Neither was in the cottage. Neither replied to the frequent calls he made.

He searched the cottage inside and out. He searched the island from end to end. He examined the boat in which Nick had crossed to the island; and at last he ran back to the skipjack.

"Go back, Ben, and get the bloodhound, will you?" he called out.

"Have you found him?" asked Ben, meaning, of course, the detective.

"No."

"Or any sign of him?"

"No."

"Then he's dead. He's gone up in smoke, that's what! Them spooks have got him, for fair!"

"Nonsense, Ben! Go and get that dog for me."

"Where's the other dog?"

"I don't know."

"Has he disappeared, too?"

"Yes."

"Well, I ain't going to kite no more dawg for you, and I ain't a-comin' back to this here island no more, either; and I ain't a-goin' to stay here clost to it no more, neither; and, by ginger, Wickiup, if you want to get aboard of this skipjack, you'd better be about it, 'cause me and Sam is goin' to light out mighty sudden."

"All right," replied Wickiup. "Put her nose in here and I'll get aboard; and then I'll bring the bloodhound back here with my own launch."

The clam-digger made no reply to this. He put the boat in close to the shore, and he helped Wickiup to climb aboard; but he did it all in utter silence, and he did not speak another word until they were on the solid ground of the other island. Then he spoke.

"Look here, Mister Wickiup," he said, with a scowl on his face, "I have allers liked you, and I want to tell you right now that I ain't goin' to be no party to your going back to that there island to be made mince-meat of by them spooks. You ain't a-goin', that's what!"

"Who is going to prevent me from going, Ben?"

"I am, by the hokey-pokey, if anybody arsks you. I'm goin' to stay right here with you until you promise me that you ain't a-goin' to risk your life on that there island no more; and if you don't make the promise, I'll hold your head under water till you beg for mercy; I will, by ginger! I kin do it, too."

"What's the use of being an ass, Ben!"

"What's the use uh bein' made a spook of before your time? That's what I asks you!"

"Something has happened over there, and I want to take the bloodhound there to help me find out what it is."

"I know what it is without no bloodhounds, Wickiup. It's spooks, that's what it is. Didn't you look all over the island for Mr. Carter, and did you find him?"

"No."

"Did you find the dawg?"

"No."

"Has his boat been tetched?"

"No."

"Is there any place on that island, inside the house or out of it, where he could hide?"

"No."

"If he was dead or unconscious, wouldn't you have found his body?"

"Yes."

"Then is ther any tarnation consarned use in going back there ag'in to do the thing all over when you know as well as I do that he ain't there?"

"But I want to find out where he is."

"Heh! I know where he is! I do!"

"Where is he, then?"

"He's in—in the place where the spooks live, wherever that is; I dunno."

"But the bloodhound can tell me how he left the island. The dog can——"

"He can't do nothin' of the sort, and you know it. He didn't tell you how them other folks left the island, did he? And don't you s'pose that the spooks bewitched that other dog into staying there just a-purpose to make the detective go back ther after him, so's they could get him? I do."

"Ben, I think you are a big——"

"Mebby I be; but I ain't a big enough one to let you go back to that island; and you ain't goin', either."

"I'll give you five dollars, Ben, if you——"

"I won't do it if you give me five hundred dollars. Ain't you seen how things is over there with your own eyes? Ain't that man disappeared, jest as if he'd gone up in smoke?"

"He certainly has."

"Then what are you goin' to do about it? Do you think it will do any good if you go up in smoke, too?"

"I don't think it is the right thing to do to leave a man in the lurch that way, and I did not believe that sort of thing of you, either, Ben. I have always thought that you were a square fellow, who would stand by another man till the last ditch, but you're no better than a coward. You're afraid of your shadow. You are no good, and you can go to the devil—and, what's more, you can take yourself and your friend off of this island just as quickly as you know how, and you can stay off it, too. You're a big baby, Ben. You'd go back on your own mother if you thought there was a spook somewhere in the same county."

"You ain't got no call to call me names, Mr. Wickiup," remonstrated Ben feebly.

"Yes, I have. You're a——"

"Ye needn't say no more, Wickiup!" This time his voice was fierce, and he was scowling. "If you do, I'll chuck you into the water and leave you to swim out. I ain't a-goin' to leave your island, neither. I'll stay here till I git good and ready to go; and I'll take it upon myself to see that you don't go to that other island, too, if I have to stay here a year. I like you, and I ain't a-goin' to see you made food for spooks, I ain't! You can put that in your pipe and smoke it, and the day will come when you'll thank me fur it, too."

Pedro had all this time been a close and a curious observer of what was taking place, and he had listened with his head first on one side and then on the other, as if he were taking it all in; and now Wickiup happened to turn and observe him, and instantly he had an idea.

"At him, Pedro!" he called out. "Sic him! Take him down and hold him, but don't hurt him! He is keeping me from going to the rescue of your master!"

It was as if the dog understood, for he leaped upward and outward through the air, struck his great paws against Ben's breast, and bore him to the ground, flat upon his back.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN CONSCIOUSNESS RETURNED.

When consciousness returned to the detective, he was not at first sure if he had not been rendered blind by his enemies, for he could see nothing at all. The fact was that the place where he was confined was absolutely dark.

But he could hear, if he could not see, and the low murmur of voices came to him from a point near at hand, although he found it impossible to decide upon the exact location.

Nor could he distinguish the words that were ut-

tered—at least, not at first; but after a little the speakers seemed to draw nearer to him, and then he could understand perfectly all that was said.

It was ominous enough, too, as he very quickly discovered.

"He won't live another hour; he can't," said one of the voices. "It was all up with him from the start. I knew that."

"I reckon that is why you let him send for the woman, isn't it?" asked a second voice; and a third one, with a laugh, interjected:

"You're a deep one, Swaggers. I wouldn't have thought that you could plan a thing and carry it all out the way you have this."

"What the devil did I come over to this blarsted country for, if not to run things in me own way?" demanded he who had been addressed as Swaggers. "When Jimmy sends for the dorg, I says to meself: 'Swaggers,' says I, 'we'll tyke the dorg to the bloomin' toff ourselves,' says I to meself; and so instead of sending of him across the water, I tykes him across, and I fetches 'im 'ere. And then when I gits 'ere I finds out that the blarsted Jimmy is a sick 'un, and I says to 'im: 'Jimmy,' says I, 'I'm wanted on the other side for slittin' a wizen, so where me bloke is there a bloomin' place where I can tyke a little rest w'ile the bobbies are a-lookin' for me?'

"And then he brings me 'ere, to this place, and I never saw a finer one.

"And then there comes a day when Jimmy was took bad, and thinkin' as how he was goin' to die, I says to 'im, says I: 'Jimmy, will you tell me now, old pal, where you buried the coin that ye got in the big crackin' ye had some'ers over here?' and he grins at me and says: 'Nobody'll ever know that, Swaggers.' 'Maybe your wife knows about it,' says I. I mean the wife he had at that time, and he know'd what I meant. Nan, you know. The one that's in there with 'im now. But 'e only jest looked at me.

"Then there came a day w'en he was took worse than ever, and it was then that he tells me to take the dorg to the detective, and leave 'im there. 'I wants Nan to have the dorg,' says 'e, 'but I don't want to bother 'er never no more; and if Nick Carter gets 'im, 'e'll see that Nan gets 'im some time.'

"So 'e orders me to tyke the dog to the detective, and I tykes 'im O. K.; and then, a week later, Jimmy was took that bad, as you'll remember, that none of us thought that he'd live through the night; and in the midst of it 'e says to me: 'Swaggers, you must go and get Nan for me and bring her here. I didn't think for to bother 'er no more,' says 'e, 'but there's something I've got to tell 'er afore I dies, and she's got to 'ear it,' says he.

"'Give 'er this,' says 'e, handing me a ring that 'e pulled from 'is finger, 'and tell 'er that I'm a-dyin', or else I wouldn't think of sendin' for 'er.'

"Well, I has me own views, has I, and I hikes me down to the bloomin' city and I goes to 'er 'ouse, and I finds that she has gone to the detective's. So around there I goes, first 'avin' got a hack and told it w'ere to wait for me; and jest as I was turnin' the corner to go to the 'ouse and arsk for 'er, w'o should blow into me bloomin' fyce but 'er and 'er man and the dorg; and then I tells 'er about it, and shows 'er the ring; and the ring does the business, only she says as 'ow 'er 'ubby 'as got to come with 'er.

"Then I brings 'er 'ere, with the 'elp of you fellows; and we tries to drive the dorg away, and drown 'im and shoot 'im and all that, which is no good till we gits on the water, and then we thinks as 'ow we've lost 'im, when I'm a shade-lifter if 'e don't turn up right 'ere before we've been back five hours.

"And then comes along that detective chap, who's tracked us 'ere, the devil knows 'ow, and we lies low w'ile 'e bothers around a bit; only w'en 'e gets too fresh, we tykes 'im in along with us, and the other gent as is Nan's 'usband—and along with Nan 'erself.

"And, me lads, this is goin' to be the finish of it all. You see, Jimmy 'eard about this place from one of the birdies wot sung alongside of 'im up at Sing Sing when 'e was there, and w'en he escyped from the steamship, 'e comes back 'ere to lay low and rest, for 'e was that long in the water that 'e took cold and took the 'ackin'-cough which is a-killing 'im.

"But the point is that nobody livin' knows about this 'ere plyce now, but Jimmy, and me, and you; and so, jest as soon as it's dark to-night, we'll get out for good. I'm going to tyke Nan with us, and I'm going to marry her, and make her my wife, and I'm goin' to make 'er tell me where the coin is buried, too; and when I finds it, we'll all go back together to the other side and spend the rest of our days over there, living like princes."

"And what about the detective and Nan's husband?" asked one of the men.

"We'll leave 'em 'ere. Bimeby they'll get 'ungry—and bimeby they won't neither of 'em be 'ungry any longer, because they'll be dead, for nobody can ever find 'em 'ere. Then Nan'll be a widdy and I can marry 'er.

"I 'ad this thing all figured out before Jimmy sent me to bring 'er 'ere. It all came to me when I took the dorg to the city for Jimmy who wanted 'er to 'ave 'im jest because she used to think a 'eap of 'im; and then, when I got Nan feelin' sure that the detective could never find this plyce, I telephoned to 'im, like a gentleman, jest to let 'im know what was what, and to make 'im think as it was Jimmy as done it. See?

"And now, lads, I'm your chief, and these is your orders:

"As soon as it is dark we'll git out the old boat from this cellar, and we'll swipe that launch once more, and we'll go ashore for good and all. We'll find my pal, Cool, awaitin' for us at a plyce I nymed; and after that we'll separate to meet where the coin is buried, where we'll devide it, share and share alike. That's fair, and there is enough, too."

"Suppose Nan refuses to tell you where it is?"

"She'll 'ave to tell me, or I'll murder Nick Carter and 'er 'usband afore her eyes and then leave 'er to starve alongside of their dead bodies," replied Swaggers savagely.

Then Nick could hear him as he started suddenly to his feet and exclaimed:

"Hark! What was that?"

"It was a noise overhead," replied one of the men. "Somebody has come to look for the detective."

"Let 'em! We'll serve them as we did 'im!" was the reply.

Nick Carter had heard the noise, too. He had also been busy while the others were talking, and already he had worked himself loose from his bonds and risen to his feet in the dark place that was his prison.

He judged that there were only three men in the place. There had been four originally, but the fourth was the one called Cool, who had taken the launch back to Wickiup, and had been put ashore on the mainland by him.

Three men in Nick Carter's present frame of mind did not amount to much; and he stepped forward, and felt around him, just as the noise of a heavy footfall sounded over his head.

He discovered that all that separated him from the room in which the three men had been talking was a heavy blanket hung across a doorway, and this he drew gently aside; and did it just as one of the three men was in the act of passing it on the other side.

There was a bright light out there, and Nick could see him plainly, and he could not resist the temptation to strike.

His fist fell like a hammer against the man's jaw, and he went down like a clod of earth that is dropped from the spoon of a spade; and as he fell, Nick leaped over his prostrate body, and dealt a second and a third man each a blow in quick succession, only that the last one was not sufficiently forcible, and the detective had to grapple with the man and throw him—which he did with a force that broke one of the scoundrel's legs.

Then he seized one of the several lights that hung against the walls of the place, and with it rushed toward the sound of those footsteps which he could still hear on the floor over his head.

He remembered now that the wall in front of him had been pushed upward when he was attacked in the stone cottage, and it cost no effort at all to find the place, or to raise it when found, for a narrow flight of stairs led up to it.

And when he raised it, he found himself standing face to face with Wickiup, while close beside him was Pedro, and directly in the rear, looking sufficiently sheepish, the clam-digger.

He did not wait for explanations then, but turned and dashed back again down the stairs to the cellar beneath; and here he soon found a heavy door, made of oak planks, heavily barred.

To remove the bar was the work of a moment, and the opening of the door disclosed a rudely constructed couch, upon which a sick man was lying; and beside which a woman with clasped hands was kneeling, while still another man was seated on a box near them.

"Nan!" said Nick; and the woman leaped to her feet with a glad cry. The sick man on the improvised bed started, as if he had heard a welcome sound, and the man on the box raised his head quickly, with a look of wonder in his eyes as if he did not believe the evidence of his own hearing.

In a moment Nan was sobbing her gratitude on Nick's bosom, and Smathers was wringing his hands violently; but Nick released himself from both, and hurried to the bedside of Jimmy Duryea, the gentleman crook.

He was dying, too. Nick saw that at once; and as he bent nearer to the stricken man Jimmy managed to whisper:

"Thank you, Carter. It was good of you. I have lived here ever since I escaped. I sent for the dog Bruce"—Bruce, hearing the sound of his name, crawled from under the couch—"so that Nan could have him. They will have to tell you the rest, Carter. I cannot. I have told Nan who I really am—and she has promised to keep the secret. And I have told her where the two hundred thousand dollars that I stole from that bank up North is buried. You will see that it is returned. Good-by, Carter. Good-by, Nan. Good-by, Mr. Smathers. Be good to her. She's a square woman. Up there, if they'll let me get in, I'll live straight, I think."

He never spoke again after that.

* * * * * * * *

The three rascals Nick landed safely behind the bars, and there was a good promise that they would serve the State a long while.

The vault beneath the old stone cottage was only a cellar that had been forgotten for generations, and which had been enlarged by tunneling beyond it into the earth. It had been used as a resort for Italian counterfeiters who made fractional money, and one of them had told Jimmy its secret while he was in prison.

It is filled up now, and the cottage has been torn down; but the island is still there, as beautiful and as green as ever.

And Mr. Wickiup still lives on the near-by island, where there are cottages.

THE END.

The next number of this weekly will contain "The Skiddoo of the K., V. & T.; or, Nick Carter's Great Train-robbery Case."

ABOUT THE EARLY NUMBERS OF THE TIP TOP WEEKLY

We receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 200 are entirely out of print. We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We give herewith a complete list of all stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine colored catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

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No.
150—Frank Merriwell's Schooldays.
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201—Frank Merriwell in Europe.
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209—Frank Merriwell's Sports Afield.
213—Frank Merriwell's Races.
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229—Frank Merriwell's Athletes.
233—Frank Merriwell's Skill.
237—Frank Merriwell's Champions.
241—Frank Merriwell's Return to Yale.
244—Frank Merriwell's Secret.
247—Frank Merriwell's Danger.
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312—Frank Merriwell's College Chums.
316—Frank Merriwell's Problem.
320—Frank Merriwell's Fortune.
324—Frank Merriwell's New Comedian.
328—Frank Merriwell's Prosperity.
332—Frank Merriwell's Stage Hit.
336—Frank Merriwell's Great Scheme.
340—Frank Merriwell in England.
344—Frank Merriwell on the Boulevards.
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486—The Conquest of a Kingdom; or, Nick Carter's Fight for a Throne.
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488—A Queen of Inferno; or, Nick Carter's Giant Foes.
489—Nick Carter's Foxy Adversary; or, The Lures of the Bird of Paradise.
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491—The Gold Lettered Dagger; or, Nick Carter's Most Tragic Case.
492—That Mysterious Affair; or, Chick's Wonderful Twelve Hours Work.
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494—The Mysterious Treasure Hunters; or, Nick Carter's Bargain With a Crook.
495—The Klondike Bank Puzzle; or, Nick Carter's Narrow Escape.
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